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ABSTRACT

This brief paper describes a school class project in which students "write" their own history books, based upon extensive research and writing activities. The guide advocates this as a way to create more interest in the subject area and allow students to become more involved in their own learning. Sections include: rationale; who could use; goals; outcomes; instructions; length of time; what's needed; what's helpful; costs; and conclusions. (EH)

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Student Made History Book

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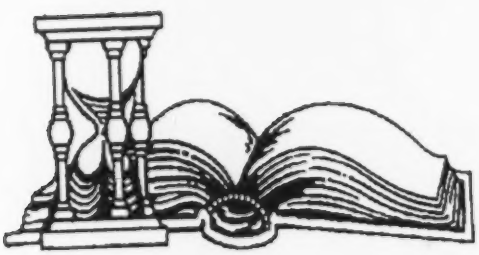

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Rationale

Because so many students always claimed that their history book was "boring", we decided that perhaps we could write one that had more meaning for them. From that idea, this program evolved.

Who Could Use

I believe this program in adaptable to any age, or ability level. The age/ability group would of course determine the depth of research required. This might also help determine the sophistication of final published work. Don't forget - each student must have a finished product (book) at the end...one that they will want to save. You will find that many will take great pride in what they have accomplished. "I can't believe I did all that work," will become something you hear often.

Goals

Help students take pride in their work.

Help students find out that they are capable of much more that they imagined.

Help students learn a body of knowledge in a way they can enjoy and feel challenged by.

Help students learn to do independent research.

Help students learn what it means to write and publish a book.

Give the students a product (their own book) to take with them when they leave your class, something tangible to remember your time together.

Outcomes

Students will have a product they can take pride in.

Students become more aware of their own abilities and can gain self-esteem by being successful in a challenging endeavor.

Teachers will learn the joy that comes from turning students creativity loose.

Instructions

1. Start by spending a few days reviewing the highlights of the period of history to be studied - in my case, U.S. history from the Vikings through the American Revolution and a brief overview to 1853, reaching out Manifest Destiny. This is accomplished by having them study a two page written summary I have written and is available on request. After reading, re-reading and studying in groups using various mnemonic devices, students are required to tell the story as best they can in their own words. Thus, by the time this process had ended, each student will have also heard the story several times.

DESIRE

DESIRE is an example of an acronym or mnemonic devise that has proved very useful as a starting point. Each letter stands for a period of American history (except the i)

D = Discovery Period
E = Exploration Period
S = Settlement Period
i is a dividing line between the Colonial Period and Independence.
R = Revolutionary War Period
E = Expansion Period

There are several other mnemonic devices that are used to make it easy for students to grasp the key events in out history. (Also available on request)

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2. Once students have a general grasp of major periods and events it is time to start the actual project and turn your student's creativity loose.

There are five chapters - DES(i)RE - each requiring basic research. There are set requirements for each chapter, but how a student chooses to fulfill them is where the creativity comes in. Students are also encouraged to exceed these requirements by either exploring the topics in greater depth or by adding information, maps, charts, drawings or cartoons to further illustrate an event, (computer graphics are becoming increasingly popular).

Length of Time

In my experience over a three year period, I have found it takes ten to fifteen weeks (meeting three double periods a week), depending on the class to finish the project. Needless to say, it therefore becomes the driving force in your curriculum planning.

What's Needed

1. A good history text
2. Use of a library for research
3. Three hole punch to put completed project in a notebook
4. Colored markers and pencils
5. Lots of paper
6. Rulers, compasses and scissors
7. Glue

What's Helpful

1. Book binding machine

2. Computer and printer

Costs

As you can see from the above, the project can be completed using just basic classroom supplies.

Conclusions

There are many advantages to this program, but one that is particularly enjoyable and important is that it allows ample time to work with students one to one. How often we teachers complain that there isn't enough time for this. Now there is.

For students it is particularly valuable to have something concrete to show for their hard work. Now they can have a book 40 to 140 (Yes-a few have actually gone this far.) pages in length that they will want to keep and show off.

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